

Grading Written Assignments

The stack of papers on your desk seems bottomless, and mid-way through the paper you are reading, you cannot remember what the student is arguing. Now you have to go back and re-read the paper. On top of this, you are not even sure what constitutes a good and bad paper anymore.

We have all been overwhelmed by the grading process. Though many of the tips below may appear to be time-consuming, they can in fact lead to a reduction in grading time and more importantly, a more productive, fruitful use of that time.

Invest Your Time Earlier in the Process

- *Clearly explain the criteria* you will use when evaluating student papers. Writing out your criteria insures consistency and provides a useful point of discussion in student conferences.
- If possible, provide a *model* to students, by photocopying an A paper from a previous assignment, for example. Explain why the paper is successful.
- *Discuss the assignment*: go over it sentence by sentence; clarify important terms; reword; illustrate with examples or ask students to do this.
- *Include informal writing* about the assignment before the final paper is due (see "In-class Writing Activities" for suggestions).
- *Conference with students*: If time, see each student individually to help them develop and revise their paper. Make your key contribution here; put a grade and only minimal comments on the final paper.
- *Use peer review* (see "Using Peer Review")

Working Through the Pile

- *Review criteria before grading*: Know exactly what you expect of an A paper, and how you will differentiate among A, B, C, D, and F papers (see below for suggestions).
- *Locate range finders*: Set aside one or two representative As, Bs, Cs, Ds which can act as touchstones if you lose focus.
- *Read through the writing once without commenting*: Respond-as-you-go is a tough habit to break, but it can interrupt the flow of your reading, creating frustration and comprehension problems.
- *Separate problem papers*: Agonizing over problem papers may disrupt your reading; set them aside and go back to them.
- *Take breaks*: Don't read an entire batch of papers in one sitting.

Holistic Grading

Holistic grading involves looking at the paper as an entire document instead of distinguishing content from form. It might help to write out a description of what constitutes an A, B, and C paper. The following paragraphs are illustrative:

- **A.** This paper is insightful. It addresses the assignment in a way that indicates your comprehension of and control over the assignment itself as well as an understanding of the

underlying issues. The message is communicated clearly, concisely, and directly. There is a confidence in this writing.

- **B.** The paper meets, and at times, exceeds the basic requirements of the assignment. The paper indicates that you are beginning, at times, to think through and deal with major ideas in the assignment. The message is communicated with generally effective clarity, directness, and conciseness.
- **C.** While the paper offers little insight into the greater issues of the assignment, it meets the basic requirements. The message, for the most part, is reasonably clear, concise, and direct, although there are some problems with your writing.

Grading With Checklists

Evaluation sheets or checklists permit:

- Students to edit their papers using the checklist guidelines
- Teachers to grade efficiently and consistently

However, some graders find segmenting the paper into specific items counter to their holistic understanding of writing. Others dislike using points that may add up to more or less than the grade the paper seems to merit.

Sample Checklist

<p>Content <i>The paper...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Addresses the topic or question <input type="checkbox"/> Accurately presents assigned authors' viewpoints <input type="checkbox"/> Provides sufficient textual evidence to support the argument <p>Structure <i>The introduction...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is present in the paper <input type="checkbox"/> Includes a clearly stated thesis <input type="checkbox"/> Indicates how the paper is organized <p><i>The body...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Contains a complete discussion and support <p><i>Each paragraph...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Includes a topic sentence <input type="checkbox"/> Develops one main idea <input type="checkbox"/> Has a transition sentence linking it to the next paragraph <p><i>The conclusion...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Recaps the thesis statement and the essay's main points <input type="checkbox"/> Presents a closing statement of the writer's position 	<p>Organization and Development <i>The entire composition</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is logically organized <input type="checkbox"/> Has a solid argument with supporting evidence <p><i>Main points</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are relevant to the thesis statement <input type="checkbox"/> Are discussed w/o too much repetition <input type="checkbox"/> Are easy to locate <p>Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is concise and precise <input type="checkbox"/> Is free of misspellings <input type="checkbox"/> Is free of grammatical mistakes <input type="checkbox"/> Lacks incomplete sentences <input type="checkbox"/> Uses correct punctuation <input type="checkbox"/> Includes subject/ verb agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Uses pronouns correctly <input type="checkbox"/> Is free of jargon and cliches <input type="checkbox"/> Cites references correctly
--	---